

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 CU-02

SAJ-01 /058 W

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R 170803Z JAN 77

FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5912

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE KUALA LUMPUR 0379

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, MY

SUBJECT: CONTROVERSIAL POLITICAN DIES OF HEART ATTACK

REF: (A) KUALA LUMPUR 0120,

(B) 76 KUALA LUMPUR 3930, (C) 76 KUALA LUMPUR 3807,

(D) 76 KUALA LUMPUR A-185

1. SUMMARY/INTRODUCTION. TAN SRI SYED JAAFAR ALBAR, 62, VETERAN UMNO ACTIVIST WHO HAD BEEN ELECTED HEAD OF PARTY'S YOUTH WING LAST JULY, DIED JAN 15 FOLLOWING HEART ATTACK AND WAS BURIED ON NATIONAL MOSQUE GROUNDS FOLLOWING DAY. HAJI SUHAIMI BIN DATUK HAJI KAMARUDDIN, DEPUTY UMNO YOUTH LEADER, MP, AND NEPHEW OF ALBAR'S PREDECESSOR, DATUK HARUN IDRIS, NOW BECOMES ACTING UMNO YOUTH CHIEF AND ACCORDING TO THE ORGANIZATION'S CONSTITUTION, WILL SERVICE IN THAT CAPACITY UNTIL NEXT UMNO YOUTH ELECTIONS AT MID-1978 GENERAL ASSEMBLY. END SUMMARY/INTRODUCTION.

2. ALBAR, WHOSE PREVIOUS MOST SENIOR POST WAS ASSISTANT INFORMATION MINISTER OVER A DECADE AGO, REGAINED HEADLINES

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IN MARCH LAST YEAR AS STAUNCH AND OUTSPOKEN SUPPORTER OF DATUK HARUN ON EVE OF LATTER'S EXPULSION FROM UMNO. ALBAR NAMED SEVERAL PROMINENT UMNO FIGURES AS COMMUNIST AGENTS AND ARREST OF INFLUENTIAL JOURNALIST SAMAD ISMAIL IN JUNE FOR COMMUNIST ACTIVITIES VINDICATED ALBAR AND ASSURED HIM THE UMNO YOUTH POST. HE SERVED SUBSEQUENTLY AS PRINCIPAL MOUTHPIECE OF THE CONSERVATIVE

"OLD GUARD" FACTION IN UMNO AND POINT MAN FOR WHAT APPEARED A FEW MONTHS BACK TO BE A BITTER AND DESTABILIZING POWER STRUGGLE IN UMNO KEYED TO THE ANTI-COMMUNIST THEME. ALTHOUGH THE READMISSION OF HARUN TO UMNO OCT 23 AND ARREST OF TWO UMNO EX-DEPUTY MINISTERS FOR ALLEGED COMMUNIST ACTIVITIES EASED THE TENSION SIGNIFICANTLY, JAAFAR ALBAR CONTINUED TO ATTACK DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER MAHATHIR MOHAMED'S LEADERSHIP, AND MAHATHIR REPLIED IN KIND. THUS THERE WAS CONSIDERABLE IRONY WHEN MAHATHIR, IN CAPACITY AS ACTING PM WHILE DATUK HUSSEIN IN MIDEAST, EULOGIZED ALBAR AS A LONG TIME AND "VERY POPULAR FIGURE" WHO IN HIS THIRTY YEARS IN UMNO "HAD CONTRIBUTED A LOT." MORE REALISTICALLY, MAHATHIR ADDED THAT ALBAR "MAY HAVE CAUSED A LOT OF CONTROVERSY."

3. FUNERAL, WHICH EMBOFF ATTENDED, BROUGHT VARIOUS UMNO FACTIONS TOGETHER FOR SHOW OF UNITY. ALMOST ENTIRE PARTY LEADERSHIP WAS PRESENT, EXCEPT THOSE WITH DATUK HUSSEIN'S PARTY. OTHER NATIONAL FRONT LEADERS PRESENT INCLUDED DATUK LEE SAN CHOON (MCA) AND DATUK ASRI (PAS). UMNO SECRETARY GENERAL DATUK SENU ABDUL RAHMAN AND FORMER YOUTH CHIEF DATUK HARUN WERE AMONG THE MOST VISIBLE OF THOSE COMFORTING THE IMMEDIATE FAMILY AS ALBAR WAS LAID TO REST IN SMALL GRASSY PLOT NEAR ENCLOSURE WHERE RAZAK IS BURIED. ALTHOUGH SIZABLE FUNERAL PROCESSION LED THROUGH SEVERAL PREDOMINANTLY CHINESE AREAS OF TOWN, AFFAIR WAS ORDERLY AND THERE WERE NO INCIDENTS, PERHAPS IN PART DUE TO CONSPICUOUS PRESENCE OF CRACK RIOT POLICE (FEDERAL RESERVE UNIT). LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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4. WITH JAAFAR'S DEATH, THE SO-CALLED "OLD GUARD" FACTIN LOSES A SPOKESMAN NOTED FOR HIS ORATORICAL ABILITIES AND WILLINGNESS TO RAISE CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES THAT OTHERS WOULD NOT DARE ARTICULATE PUBLICLY. HIS CRITICS, HOWEVER, VIEWED HIM AS IRRESPONSIBLE ON THE SAME GROUNDS, AND THERE ARE MANY WHO ARE NOT SORRY TO SEE HIM OFF THE SCENE. AS FOR UMNO YOUTH, HARUN HAS NEVER CEASED TO DOMINATE IT FROM BEHIND THE SCENES. WITH SEVERAL FURTHER LEGAL CHALLENGES AHEAD, WE DO NOT THINK HE WILL SEEK TO REGAIN HIS TITLE AS YOUTH PRESIDENT, PREFERRING TO RUN THE ORGANIZATION THROUGH HIS NEPHEW FROM BEHIND THE SCENES. DILLON

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